

Regional Council Activity Report

January 30, 2002

Briefing to Member Agencies from Executive Director James M. Bourey



Executive Director's Report

After completing my fifth year as executive director for MAG, I recall the words of Teddy Roosevelt, who said, "Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing."

Truly I can say that during my tenure here at MAG, I've had the chance to work hard at work worth doing. And, since my "wooden anniversary" represents an opportunity to celebrate the solid work done at MAG – I'd like to highlight some of MAG's accomplishments that I've found to be especially meaningful over the past five years.

Shortly after my arrival in 1997, we completed the split away from the Arizona League of Cities and Towns and established our own office with a separate staff to focus exclusively on regional issues. This highly skilled and professional staff has been crucial to the continued success of MAG, which has become nationally recognized for best practices ranging from our cooperatively-developed transportation program and revenue estimates, to our outreach to minority communities, to our air quality conformity process.

One of the most significant accomplishments over the past five years was the 1998 effort that led MAG to achieve a "fair share" of the transportation funding coming to this region. Our detailed analysis showed that we were receiving only about 10.5 percent of the discretionary funding returned to the state, even though the region at the time was contributing about 38 percent of the revenue (after accounting for funding the region receives directly). Updated figures show that our contribution has now risen to more than 40 percent. This analysis led to discussions of revenue allocation with the Arizona Department of Transportation and other regions, and resulted in a revised funding approach. This change has led to hundreds of millions of additional dollars coming to our region over the past five years. Compare the \$228 million allocated for the FY 1999-2003 program to the \$919 million contained in the current FY 2003-2007 program. This increase of \$691 million for the five-year program represents 33 percent of discretionary funding – much closer to the amount we generate.

Another outgrowth of the funding discussions was the agreement we've all come to know as the "Casa Grande Resolves." This agreement marked a

significant departure from the old way of doing business by combining the transportation planning and programming procedures of the State and regions into one multi-modal transportation planning process for each region. In a process being emulated across the country, ADOT and MAG now work together along with the other regions of the state to develop an appropriate allocation of transportation funding. In addition, ADOT and MAG now cooperatively plan projects for which available transportation funding will be used.

Another major accomplishment of the past five years has been the acceleration of the Regional Freeway System from 2014 to 2007 – made possible primarily because of the process MAG led to increase funding to the region. MAG then worked with ADOT, the state legislature and the governor’s office to secure the final financing mechanisms needed to complete the accelerated program.

Other significant achievements have included the creation of several new programs, such as the MAG Domestic Violence Program – which has already made a difference in the resources available to victims in this region – and the Freeway Service Patrol, which saves lives and reduces traffic congestion by assisting 8,000 motorists each year. In the year 2000, our planning effort to address homelessness in Maricopa County resulted in the highest funding ever awarded in homeless housing and services projects – a record \$18.6 million in Homeless Continuum of Care funding awards from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

MAG continues to advance technologically as well. Our recently installed Regional Videoconferencing System is being used by member agencies across the region to reduce travel and improve air quality. Six Valley communities now have Internet, e-mail and Web capabilities that they didn’t have before, thanks to the MAG Regional Connections project.

On the air quality front, we have not violated the standards for either carbon monoxide or ozone for the past five years, and we recently received notification of approval by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for our particulate plan. Our demonstration of air quality conformity in a timely manner has enabled us to continue our aggressive schedules for transportation projects.

This is just some of the important work undertaken by the organization in the past five years. I consider it an extreme privilege to work with such a professional staff, and with member agencies who recognize the value of regional cooperation. I offer my thanks to those who have helped make all of these endeavors into successes, and I find myself deeply appreciative of the “greatest prize that life offers.”



Regional Council Meeting Report for January 30, 2002

Council Approves ADOT Programs for Public Review

The MAG Regional Council has agreed to forward for public review and comment several major transportation programs. The programs were developed in a cooperative effort with the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) and Valley Metro.

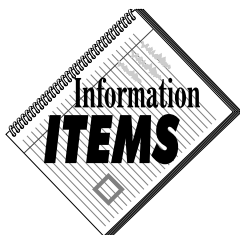
The Council approved the Tentative Freeway Life Cycle Program for the MAG Freeway System, which provided the detailed plan for the design and construction of the MAG Freeway Plan for FY 2003 through FY 2007. The plan reflects the adopted priorities and accelerated schedule to complete the Regional Freeway Program in 2007. In addition, the Council approved a cooperatively-developed list of projects for funding consideration for the new fifth year of the Five-Year Highway Construction Program, and the Cooperatively Developed Transit Program. Additional recommendations were made for more than \$40 million of Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program and Surface Transportation Program funds.

For more information contact Eric Anderson, MAG Transportation Manager, (602) 254-6300.

Road Acceleration Aims to Save Lives

In an effort to improve safety along a section of highway that has been the scene of many accidents, the MAG Regional Council voted to allocate \$64.4 million to accelerate planned improvements for State Route 85. The 30-mile section of SR 85, which connects I-10 with I-8, carries significant heavy truck traffic and has experienced a number of fatal accidents over the past few years. Under the acceleration, improvements will be complete in 2005, five years earlier than planned. The improvements will be paid for through Grant Anticipation Notes, an innovative financing technique in which notes are issued pledging future federal funds as repayment for the notes.

For more information, contact Eric Anderson, MAG Transportation Manager, (602) 254-6300.



Information Items

MAG Video Released

The Maricopa Association of Governments has completed a video that will help viewers gain a better understanding of the Maricopa Association of Governments, its roles and responsibilities, and its ultimate mission of regional cooperation.

The ten-minute video provides a visual overview of MAG, including a narrative that uses easy-to-understand language to describe each of MAG's core emphasis areas. The tape looks at MAG's role in transportation, air quality, regional development, human services, information/technology, and public involvement.

The video includes interviews with five Regional Council members. The interviews were taped on location to better communicate that MAG is a regional agency that represents cities in every corner of the Valley.

For more information contact Kelly Taft, Communications Manager, (602) 254-6300.

Survey Shows Support for Extension of Regional Sales Tax

A survey of Maricopa County voters indicates that there is solid initial support for the extension of a regional sales tax to fund transportation and transit improvements.

The half-cent sales tax, known as the Regional Area Road Fund, was approved by Maricopa County voters in 1985. The fund, which has been used to pay for the construction of the regional freeway system and to provide a small amount of funding for public transit improvements, is set to expire in 2005. There are proposals to extend this tax another 20 years to continue to meet the transportation needs of our rapidly-growing region.

In a survey conducted on behalf of the Maricopa Association of Governments and the Regional Public Transportation Authority, WestGroup Research found that 72 percent of respondents initially favored the extension of the sales tax beyond 2005. The number of respondents favoring the extension grew to 79 percent when researchers provided additional information about projected increases in population and vehicle travel, which could double average commute times in the region unless additional transportation investments are made.

When asked to identify the most important issue facing the Valley, 25 percent of respondents cited public transportation/mass transit, while 18 percent identified traffic congestion as their top concern.

When asked to identify solutions to address the problems, responses included a number of options, including more law enforcement (15%); expanding light rail services throughout the county (14%); building more freeways (10%); improving local bus service throughout the county (10%); and adding more lanes to the freeways within Maricopa County (7%).

For more information contact Dawn Coomer, MAG Multimodal Program Manager, (602) 254-6300.



Upcoming Issues

Decline in Expected Federal Revenues

Recently released revenue figures from the US Department of Transportation indicate a sharp decline in expected revenues from federal gas tax receipts, meaning that some significant belt-tightening might be in store for the region when it comes to transportation funding. Projections indicate a federal shortfall for fiscal year 2003 of \$9 billion – which would represent a 29 percent decrease in transportation funding nationally. If the numbers are determined to be accurate (an audit is being conducted), and if the trend continues, it could result in a reduction of \$128 million to the MAG region over the next five years. MAG transportation planners are hoping that Congress will either come up with replacement funding, or that reauthorization of TEA-21 (TEA-3) will let a notch or two back out of the shrinking belt.

For more information contact Eric Anderson, MAG Transportation Manager, (602) 254-6300.



Upcoming Events

Transportation Fair Offers Opportunity for Input

Valley citizens will have an opportunity to tell decision makers what they think about key regional and state transportation plans during a Transportation Fair February 21. The fair will be held from 3:30 - 5:30 p.m. at the Central Station Transit Center (northeast corner of 1st Avenue and Van Buren) in Phoenix. Valley Metro and the Arizona Department of Transportation will also be on hand. The Transportation Fair represents an informal opportunity for citizens to see displays, ask questions, and provide input into the agencies' transportation plans.

For more information contact Jason Stephens, MAG Public Involvement Planner, (602) 254-6300.

Next Regional Council Meeting

The next Regional Council meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 27, 2002 at 5:00 p.m. at the MAG offices, 302 N. 1st Ave., Suite 200. Agenda items are expected to include discussion of federal transportation funding from FY 2002-2007, initial and interim closeout for the FY 2002 Federally Funded Program, transit amendments to the existing FY 2002-2006 Transportation Improvement Program, an update on the possibility of conducting a 2005 Special Census, and review and possible approval of MAG Governance Task Force recommendations. Additional agenda items are pending.

For more information contact Dennis Smith, MAG Assistant Director, (602) 254-6300.